

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is David Russell, and I was born in Abilene, Texas. I am a graduate of the Innerchange Freedom Initiative Ministry (IFI) and now a volunteer of IFI.

I made a decision to transfer (after a few years into my second incarceration) from West Texas to the Houston area believing and trusting in God to provide a way for my transition into a new surrounding.

Years into my second incarceration I knew there had to be a better way of life. I just didn't know where to start or even begin. But as years passed by, things started to become clearer to me, that the only way was to let God's will for my life start to prevail. Not knowing much as to what was in store for me in this new way of living, I started to see things a lot more clearly than before. But still not sure where God was taking me, I just started to trust and believe in God's word. Then it happened. A program was being put into effect in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice System called the Innerchange Freedom Initiative Program. It originated in the Houston area, but there were still many hurdles I had to overcome. It seemed as though I would never get there. Another year had passed by since I heard of the program, and then it happened. I was being transferred to another unit in the TDCJ system. Not knowing which unit I was being transferred to, I started wondering would I ever be able to get away from my past. A couple of days later I went before classification, and I was told my next unit to where I would be assigned would be the Jester 2 Unit. The Jester 2 Unit, now the Carol S. Vance Unit, was where the Innerchange Freedom Initiative program was now in process. I had gotten past another obstacle on my way to a new life.

A year had gone by since my transfer to the Jester 2 Unit. I was still not in the program as of yet, but then it happened a couple of IFI members that I had worked with and also built a friendship with, asked me if I wanted to become a member of the IFI program and I said yes without any hesitation. So they took me to see the program Director and program Manager and I gave them my information. Weeks later I was accepted into the program and God continued to move in my life. Doors began to open and my new way of life began to flourish. There I met my mentor, Jim McNeill. This was just one of many relationships that were built while in the IFI program. Other relationships were also formed that were still just as strong as my relationship with my mentor. Jim and Joyce McNeill are my extended family and I love them dearly. I'm blessed to have many Christian people in my life that will guide and encourage me as I continue my growth with Christ Jesus.

Let me close by saying that other offenders will benefit from the prison reform act. The current rehabilitation process must be addressed and dealt with. Not rehabilitation, but transformation has to be brought into the foreground of the offender's incarceration. Offenders must be prepared to take their responsible places in our society and be productive citizens and positive family members. Not to be the problem in society, but a part of the solution.

Thank You
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